

Commission to Study College Affordability and College Completion  
Resolves 2013, Chapter 109

Chairs:

Senator Rebecca J. Millett  
Representative Matthea Elizabeth Daughtry

Staff:

Lock Kiermaier

Website: <http://www.maine.gov/legis/opla/collegeaffordability.htm>

**Meeting Summary**  
**September 18, 2014**  
**Room 202, Cross Office Building**  
**Augusta, ME**

Members present: Senator Rebecca Millett (Chair), Representative Mattie Daughtry (Chair), Representative Brian Hubbell, Representative Matt Pouliot, John Fitzsimmons (MCCS), Wendy Ault (MELMAC), Ryan Low (UMS), Gianna Marrs (UM), Mila Tappan (FAME), Elizabeth True (MMA), Lisa Plimpton (Mitchell Institute), Robert Clark (Husson University)

Staff: Lock Kiermaier (Contract)

The meeting commenced at approximately 9:30 AM. The Chairs, Senator Rebecca Millett and Representative Mattie Daughtry, asked those members present to introduce themselves.

After a review of the proposed agenda, the Chairs explained to the Commission that the planned-for panel composed of parents and students to talk about certain aspects of college affordability had been canceled due to a lack of participants. The Chairs also stated that alternative means of gathering the same kind of input would be discussed at the end of the meeting.

The Chairs then welcomed Mr. Bill Norbert, Governmental Affairs and Communications Manager for FAME, and Mr. Claude Roy, Education Services Manager for FAME. Mr. Norbert and Mr. Roy presented copies of a letter dated 9/18/14 sent by Mr. Norbert in response to specific questions and requests made by the commission after a presentation by FAME at the 8/26/14 meeting regarding the Maine State Grant Program.

The letter from Mr. Norbert provided the following information:

- The commission had requested data on the number of students in Academic Year 2015 who fell into the \$0 to \$10,000 Estimated Family Contribution (EFC) range who had filed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) but did not receive a Maine State Grant Award because they had missed the May 1<sup>st</sup> application deadline and what the cost would be to have made grants to these additional students. Mr. Norbert's letter specified that 3,578 additional students would have received grants at a cost of \$2.2 million in additional General Fund appropriations from the Legislature. Mr. Norbert's

letter also specified that if the current May 1<sup>st</sup> application deadline were to be abolished, that an additional 4,835 students would receive grants at a further cost of approximately \$4 million in General Fund appropriations.

- The commission had also asked for a breakdown of the percentage of students currently receiving Maine State Grant awards who classified themselves as independent vs. dependent students. Mr. Norbert's letter provided the following data:
  - For Academic Year 2014, 52% of the students identified themselves as independent whereas 48% were dependent;
  - For Academic Year 2013, 47% of the students identified themselves as independent whereas 53% were dependent; and
  - For Academic Year 2012, 49% of the students identified themselves as independent whereas 51% were dependent.
- In addition, the commission had also asked for a compilation of other states that had programs similar to the Maine State Grant program that also made use of FAFSA-EFC data in making grant awards. Mr. Norbert's letter specified the following:
  - A total of 33 states (including Maine), plus Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico, made similar use of the FAFSA-EFC data in making grant awards;
  - 11 states make use of federal data with some modifications for data regarding additional income/assets and cost of attendance;
  - 2 states use their own data collecting systems; and
  - 4 states do not have programs similar to the Maine State Grant Program.

In presenting the information contained in the letter, Mr. Norbert and Mr. Roy made reference to an attached graph entitled "Maine State Grant Data for Academic Year 2015" and then responded to additional questions from commission members:

- When asked about the current status of students who missed the May 1<sup>st</sup> deadline, FAME replied that those students do not get Maine State Grant awards. President Fitzsimmons commented that ¼ of CCS students enroll after May 1<sup>st</sup> therefore missing any chance to receive these grants;
- FAME was next asked if any tiering of awards (a junior might receive a larger grant award than a freshman) is currently taking place and FAME responded that tiering has been authorized by the Legislature and that FAME is currently considering implementing tiering but that certain additional legislative tweaks will be required. In particular, FAME would need to be authorized to give first year grants that are lower than the current statutory minimum of \$1,000. Senator Millett then suggested that several options be added to the Draft Template to Facilitate Analysis of Affordability Options that the commission has been working on; these options include:
  - Increasing annual Maine State Grant awards to \$1,500;
  - Increasing annual Maine State Grant awards to \$2,500;
  - Increase the EFC cut-off level to \$10,000; and
  - Tiering grant awards at \$250 increments over 4 years from an initial grant award of \$1,000;

- FAME was then asked about 5 year students and how they are treated under the current program. FAME responded that current state law authorizes full year grants for 5 year programs and that decision with regards to possible tiering has not yet been made or implemented;
- Next, a clarifying question was asked as to what constitutes full time for a student to receive a grant award and FAME responded that 12 credit hours (6 credit hours for part-time) is used as the criteria for determining full time student status;
- FAME was then asked why the current May 1<sup>st</sup> application deadline was necessary; FAME responded that to do away with that deadline would create a number of very significant administrative, funding and logistical challenges; and
- Finally, FAME was asked about the possibility of creating a retroactive application deadline for 1<sup>st</sup> year students. This possibility was enthusiastically supported by a number of commission members with the further possibility of creating two-tiered deadline with an initial grant of \$500 for those students that miss the May 1<sup>st</sup> deadline.

Next, the commission heard a presentation regarding the “Improving College Affordability & Completion in Maine” report which was submitted to the Legislature on 3/3/14. The intent of that report was to ask higher education institutions in Maine to identify actions that they are taking now at no additional cost to improve college affordability and completion and further, to identify future options that require additional funding to address college affordability and completion. The following individuals who helped prepare that report addressed the commission regarding their portion of the report:

- Bill Norbert from FAME: Currently, FAME has implemented various comprehensive outreach activities to promote college access and provide information regarding college financing. For the future, FAME is recommending that maximum amount of grants from the Maine State Grant program be increased to \$1,500 at an approximate cost of \$12.5 million. FAME also recommended the establishment of a Workforce Development Undergraduate Loan Program which was not included in the final recommendations of the Joint Select Committee on Maine’s Workforce and Economic Future.
- John Fitzsimmons from Maine Community College System: President Fitzsimmons spoke to the cost requests from the MCCS:
  - Hire 15 additional Student Success Counselors at an annual cost of \$1 million to serve approximately 16,000 Maine students;
  - Increase funding by an annual cost of \$2 million for additional work study opportunities for the 7 colleges within the MCCS to serve 500 students. President Fitzsimmons emphasized that such a program would not negatively impact individual grant awards from the Federal Pell Grant program;
  - Create an Alternative Semester Scholarship at an annual cost of \$3.6 million; this program would provide additional grant opportunities for those students seeking to attend college during the summer; and
  - At an annual cost of \$800,000, expand Student Success Academies to help address some of the remedial academic issues faced by many MCCS students; this expansion would serve an additional 500 students. President Fitzsimmons further noted that the MCCS is currently devoting considerable existing resources

towards this effort and does not plan at the present time to ask for additional resources to expand the program.

- Bob Clark from Husson University and the Maine Independent Colleges Association: President Clark emphasized the following from Husson's perspective:
  - Husson University is the most affordable private institution of higher education in Maine;
  - Husson strives to offer affordable programs that are not duplicative and are within the university's capability to deliver with excellence;
  - Husson works to develop collaborative programs with other higher eds and has been doing so for quite a long period of time;
  - Husson appreciates a legislative perspective that focuses on doing "no harm" to private higher eds, particularly with regards to taxation policy and taxable donations;
  - Husson offers work force flexibility to help keep costs down;
  - Husson proactively addresses the remediation issues faced by some of its student body;
  - Husson works to encourage student persistence (i.e. completion); and
  - Husson works with its students to design affordable loans.
  
- Elizabeth True from Maine Maritime Academy: Ms. True mentioned the following:
  - Increasing the Maine State Grant program at a cost of \$190,000 for 4 years;
  - Hire a First Year Experience Coordinator at a 3 year cost of \$190,000;
  - Expand the College Student Inventory at a 3 year cost of \$4,700; this program provides invaluable data about student risk factors; and
  - Hire an Academic Coach at an annual cost of \$60,000.
  
- Ryan Low from the University of Maine System: Mr. Low mentioned the following priorities:
  - Preserve the existing General Fund appropriation to the UMS and ideally, increase that appropriation to keep pace with inflation. Since 2008, the GF appropriation to the UMS has declined by \$6.2 million and yet the UMS has been able to freeze tuition for 3 consecutive years; and
  - Provide additional resources for the Maine State Grant Program.

The Commission Chairs then started a discussion regarding additional options to be included in the Draft Template to Facilitate Analysis of Affordability Options. Aside from the previously identified options regarding the Maine State Grant Program, Senator Millett listed the following options to be included in the Template:

- Having FAME administer a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) Education Loan Program; this loan program would be created to provide loans of up to \$20,000 for 50 students;
- MCCS proposals:
  - Hire 15 additional Student Success Counselors at an annual cost of \$1 million to serve approximately 16,000 Maine students. President Fitzsimmons updated this

- request to the current need for a total of 30 new Student Success Counselors at an approximate annual cost of \$2 million to serve one-third of matriculated students;
  - Increase funding by an annual cost of \$2 million for additional work study opportunities for the 7 colleges within the MCCS to serve 500 students; and
  - Create an Alternative Semester Scholarship at an annual cost of \$3.6 million.
- MMA proposals:
  - Hire a First Year Experience Coordinator at a 3 year cost of \$190,000;
  - Expand the College Student Inventory at a 3 year cost of \$4,700; and
  - Hire an Academic Coach at an annual cost of \$60,000.
- UMS proposals:
  - Preserve the existing General Fund appropriation to the UMS and ideally, increase that appropriation to keep pace with inflation. (Mr. Low was asked to provide specific amounts to be used in defining this option for the draft template.)

The Commission Chairs then initiated another panel discussion concerning a report which is titled “Statewide Education and Workforce Development Strategic Plan”; this report was originally submitted to the Legislature on 1/30/14. The panel participants made the following comments:

- President John Fitzsimmons, Maine Community College System: The report was initiated by the Joint Select Committee on Maine’s Workforce and Economic Future and required the University of Maine System, the Maine Community College System, Maine Maritime Academy and the Maine Department of Education to collaborate in the first ever long term strategic planning process for education in the state of Maine. President Fitzsimmons emphasized the following:
  - From this commission’s perspective, the most important part of the strategic plan was Objective 1 of Goal 2 (page 12 of the report):
    - Goal 2: Provide higher education programs leading to academic credentials that meet the demands of the current and emerging economy.
      - Objective 1. Improve persistence and graduation rates.
  - The report specifies a number of specific and quantifiable measures regarding persistence and graduation rates that the different report participants will work to achieve in a 3 year time span.
  - President Fitzsimmons also lauded the Maine Maritime Prep program initiated by MMA to prepare students by first enrolling in the MCCS and then, after the necessary academic success, transferring to MMA.
  - He also mentioned the strategic plan’s recognition of the importance of identifying and addressing the academic need of groups of students that have not been previously successful in higher education.
- Elizabeth True, Maine Maritime Academy: Ms. True focused her initial comments on the need for comprehensive and collaborative remedial efforts across the state’s educational system. She also made the following comments:

- It is crucial to work collaboratively across the systems to more easily transfer credits between the state’s higher education institutions.
  - She further suggested that future credit transfer efforts may be facilitated by targeting specific educational programs for credit transfer among the different public higher education institutions.
  - It is very important to realize that this strategic plan is based on the current level of financial resources and funding available to each of the report participants.
  - She also mentioned the importance reflected in the strategic plan of academic/employer collaborations and the goal of trying to keep college graduates in the state after they graduate.
  - Ms. True also mentioned the inclusion of an important section of the report (page 27) titled “Strategic Areas to Consider for Future Investment”.
- Ryan Low, University of Maine System: Mr. Low reiterated the earlier comments made by President Fitzsimmons and Ms. True. Mr. Low’s additional comments included the following:
    - UMS supports the importance and necessity of creating and offering online courses to facilitate college affordability and completion;
    - He will report back to the commission on current efforts, including credit transfers, being undertaken by each of the UMS campuses to achieve affordability and encourage completion.

Comments and concerns raised by Commission members included the following:

- With regards to the Early College for ME program offered by the MCCS, specific information is need on the current cost, how many current schools are being served, the number of students being served, what additional financial resources would it take to offer the program to the 30 public schools that are on the waiting list for services? Senator Millett would like this option to be added to the Draft Template to Facilitate Analysis of Affordability Options.

To finish up the meeting, the Commission Chairs then engaged the commission in further discussion about a number of topics which included the following:

- It was agreed that due to limitations on its own time and resources, as well as other study efforts that are currently under way, that the Commission need not delve further into the current efforts being made on the K-12 public education to level to encourage college persistence;
- With regards to the need to further hear from the various public constituencies regarding college affordability, the Commission decided to do the following:
  - Develop a series of questions for an online, anecdotal survey that would be available for members of the public to respond to;
  - Commission members are urged to develop and submit questions to be included in this survey as soon as possible. Questions are to be submitted either to the Commission Chairs or to Commission staff person Lock Kiermaier; and

- The Commission Chairs will work with Mr. Kiermaier to design the survey and may seek the assistance of UMS technical staff suggested by Ryan Low.
- The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:30 PM.